COMMUNICATING IN SPITE OF TLAs (THREE-LETTER ACRONYMS):

Part 1: It May Not Be Painless, but It's Quick

Diane F. Miller
Jet Propulsion Laboratory
California Institute of Technology
Pasadena, CA 91109

> Vague and insignificant forms of speech, and abuse of language, have so long passed for mysteries of science; and hard or misapplied words with little or no meaning have, by prescription, such a right to be mistaken for deep learning and height of speculation, that it will not be easy to persuade either those who speak or those who hear them, they are but the covers of ignorance and hindrance of true knowledge.
>
> John Locke (I 632-1704)

First, let's agree on what we mean by an acronym. Technically speaking, an acronym is an abbreviation that is pronounced as a word, made up of the first letters or first parts of the words in a term (scuba, NASA, DOS), while an initialism is an abbreviation that is *not* pronounced as a word, made up of the first letters of the words in a term (such as VI l', SGML). So what *really* determines whether an abbreviation is an acronym or an initialism? Usually, it is merely the presence or absence of vowels in the abbreviation that renders it reasonable or not to pronounce as a word- a very arbitrary and picayune distinction, if you ask me. Thus, even though as a technical communicator I'm supposed to care about such distinctions, 1 am going to call I all these abbreviations acronym-- as does most of the rest of the world.

Our technologically and socially complex culture seems to constantly demand new vocabulary to describe our new concepts, inventions, products, organizations, etc. The problem is that we also have to learn almost daily the new vocabulary others have created. The trend toward reducing these ncw terms to acronyms and then throwing away the original words has been with us for some time; however, this cram has now spread far beyond the world of technical and other specialized jargons. Acronyms are invading our daily newspaper's front page stories, commercial advertisements on television, ordinary conversations, and just about every other verbal medium of our modern culture. I am seriously concerned for our language, because, in most cases, the use of acronyms muddies the message and confounds and confuses the reader or listener, even when the originator thinks the terms are well-known.

in this issue, we'll look at some possible reasons behind some of this retrogressive (in my humble opinion) evolution of our language. Next issue, 1'11 suggest some concrete ways to slow it down a bit, and at least attempt to be a voice for clarity and reason.

Hidden Agendas . . .

The tendency to "acronym ize" (forgive me) may have psychological and historical influences, as well as the perhaps more obvious practical ones.

From a practical point of view, using an acronym to stand for a long term or phrase is seen as saving time (and paper) for both the originator and the recipient of the communication. For example, few would argue against using the acronym "DNA" for "deoxyribonucleic acid" in

popular media discussions of murder case evidence. Another practical move is the simultaneous invention of a term and its acronyrnn so that the acronym itself carries a meaning evocative of the full term. For example, an organization to help prevent spousal abuse calls itself the PAIRS Foundation, for the Practical Application of Intimate Relationship Skills Foundation. The acronym itself connotes the complete name. And you're probably familiar with MADD, Mothers Against Drunk Driving. In this case, the acronym even intensifies the meaning of its antecedent.

But relatively few acronyms do much to serve the purposes of expediency or mnemonic cueing. Far more often, the motives for using acronyms are more subtle. Dare we speculate?

You've just invented a new software system, formed a new committee, funded a new building, or created a new product. You give the new thing a name, usually made up of ordinary English words; but you want somehow to christen the new thing with some sign of uniqueness that ordinary English words cannot afford it. Aha! You give it an acronym. Your new data system is officially named something mundane like the "Managment Information and Planning System. " But by calling it MIPS, you have created a brand new word for your invention.

In the case of consumer products, such as shampoo and toothpaste, the marketeers sometimes create very scientific-sounding names for some "magic" ingredient, such as "Nutrimin Polyalginous Complex, and then use the acronym "NPC" on the packaging or advertising. 'l'he capital letters make the potion sound very high-tech and scientific, when maybe it is nothing much more than petroleum jelly with chlorophyll added.

Language exists in, and often defines, a community. Acronyms, of course, are a form of jargon, and jargon is simply a subset of a language that is used by a particular group. Its use defines who is in the group and who is outside the group. So it is to be expected that group members will feel comfortable communicating in their jargon. The use of jargon may actually strengthen the bonds among the group members. However, if the jargon is used knowingly irr the presence of an "outsider," the speaker or writer may be trying (consciously or unconsciously) to exclude or intimidate the outsider, or perhaps simply to impress the outsider with his or hcr own membership in the group. In any case, even if the originator is oblivious to the receiver's group membership or lack of it, the effect on the receiver is the same: Intimidation, annoyance, and/or frustration because the message is meaningless.

As editors, we have all encountered authors who resist giving up their five dollar words in favor of two-bit words that say the same thing. They are afraid that if they write clearly and simply, they will be perceived as simple-minded. Something like this phenomenon may be at work in the over-use of acronyms. People may use an excess of acronyms in their writing and speech to reinforce their image as knowledgeable members of the in-group, and hide their insecurities about their true worthiness.

Historical Legacy

Enough amateur psychologizing. Let's be amateur cultural historians for a while. We Americans, with a history of colonizing and taming a new frontier, are known for our inventiveness, resourcefulness, and ability to "make it up as we go along." We don 't have much respect for tradition for its own sake. We've always felt quite free to make up new words when no existing ones would quite fit. For example, allthough the exact origin of theworld-renowned acronym "OK" is in dispute, it most certainly is American.

in addition, wide-spread literacy gives writing unprecedented influence on the evolution of language. language was speech long before it was writing, so writing has generally attempted to symbolize speech (phonetic alphabets) or at least ideas (ideograms), with speech driving language change and writing following to record that change. Now, with almost everybody reading and writing, topics get introduced and discussed on paper before or concurrent with their introduction in speech. Writing becomes the driver, exerting more and more influence on speech. "1'bus, we

have acronyms, symbols of the written (not spoken) word. Acronyms are not necessarily even phonetic symbols of the words, or any parts of the words, they stand for– example, CPR (cardiopulmonary resuscitation), where the sound "see" (C) stands for the "k" sound in cardio.

The Price

Learning new words or combinations of words based on our previous knowledge of the language is one thing. But when those words are pushed to a further level of abstraction that leaves behind intrinsic semantic meaning, communication gets left behind too. Furthermore, there arc no rules at work in the creation of "words" at this new level of language—a situation that hardly ever exists in natural human language. When we come to an unknown acronym while trying to follow a difficult argument, our brains do an abrupt downshift from high gear to low. The processing required to understand abstract concepts is at a totally different level from the basic (and presumably automatic in a fluent reader and speaker of the language) process of parsing a symbol or sound into a meaningful idea.

The motive of expediency is misdirected if abbreviating leads to loss of clarity of the message. The over-abundant use of acronyms in technical, business, and even some popular writing may at times be the single largest impediment to clear communication and readability. Unless they are extremely familiar to us, acronyms, even when defined initially in a document or article, slow us down and frustrate us in our attempt to understand even the main points. Because of its intrinsic lack of semantic content, a new acronym must be encountered many times before it is likely to become a comfortable part of an individual's vocabulary.

Where to Begin?

Our late beloved Mary Fran Buehler (1986) studied the role of rules in technical communication. She found that, according to technical communicators themselves, there are three rules (requirements) of communication:

- Completeness
- Conciseness
- Fidelity

The acronym is a wonderful example of the tension between the need for completeness and the desire for conciseness (presumably in the achievement of fidelity). However, the reason for fidelity is ethical, the reason for completeness is ethical, and the reason for conciseness is practical. Therefore, if wc have to choose between completeness and conciseness, we should choose completeness, since an ethical reason should outrank a practical one.

But we first have to ask ourselves "Complete for whom? Concise for whom?' Editors who insist in good faith that people spell out acronyms that the community knows only (or mainly) as acronyms will be spotted as outsiders and alienate the community. So, as usual, there is no substitute for knowing your audience.

However, my experience is that the audience is almost always broader than the author (or presenter) thinks it is. For example, a design review board will inevitably include a member of management who will not be familiar with the acronyms the presenting engineers use daily in the project. A team meeting will often include a new member. A report written to the immediate boss will be combined with others and sent up the management levels. A manual to document a software program used only internally will bc studied by a new employee.

If the communicator can identify the one person in the (invited) audience who is least familiar with the topic, and speak or write to that person, chances are no one will get lost or alienated. Conversely, if you arc an invited attendee at a meeting (or among the implied readership of a

document), you have a right to expect to be communicated with in a reasonably clear fashion. If this isn't happening, don't hesitate to speak up. Chances are there are others in the audience who will thank you, at least in thought.

In the next issue, once YOU have some awareness of who the audience is, 1 will offer some concrete guidelines on what you can abbreviate, where, and how often, without sacrificing completeness.

References

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Diane F. Miller
Documentation Group Leader, Mission Operations Section
Jet Propulsion Laboratory
California Institute of Technology
4800 Oak Grove Drive
Pasadena, California 91109, USA
(81 8) 354-9105

An STC member for 13 years, Ms. Miller has a B.A. in E nglish and writes software user manuals for JPL's (oops!) Multimission Ground Data System.

COMMUNICATING IN SPITE OF TLAS (THREE-LETTER ACRONYMS)

Part II: On Being a Force for Salvation (of Meaning)

Diane F. Miller
Jet Propulsion Laboratory
California Institute of Technology
Pasadena, CA 91109

Last issue, in Part I of this article, we speculated about why acronyms are flooding into both the spoken and written language, both in specialized technical communication and in the popular culture. We also looked at some of the reasons their abundant use severely hampers communication. This issue, I'll suggest some guidelines we use in our Mission Operations user documentation at the Jet Propulsion laboratory for mitigating the destruction. Although most of these suggestions address issues of written documentation, many of them also apply to oral communication, from formal presentation to ordinary conversation.

What to Abbreviate

Be selective.

Save the use of acronyms for terms repeated many times in the document. For a term likely to be new to most of your audience, avoid using an acronym if the term is used fewer than six or eight times in ten pages of text. Also, if a term is likely to be new to your readers, define it more than once. Your reader may have to be reminded again later if time has passed or other acronyms have been introduced. For example, even if we tell readers the first time we use the term MCD that it is a maximum-likelihood convolutional decoder, if we then introduce sixteen more acronyms on the next two pages before again referring to an MCD, who will remember?

Consider the breadth of the finished document.

If you are writing a detailed portion of a large document, or a few paragraphs or bulleted items that will become part of a compiled report (such as your department's monthly status report), then, in addition to considering in how much detail to cover your subject in order to fit into the context, consider also the purpose and scope of the whole document or report. If many technical subjects will be briefly covered, you can expect most readers will be unfamiliar with at least some of them. Therefore, you would be doing the reader a service by using meaningful words, rather than acronyms.

If, on the other hand, the document is an in-depth treatise on a narrow subject, you can expect your audience to be more homogeneous. You are in a better position to assume which terms might be familiar to your audience. If the document is addressed to both specialists in the subject area and generalists or specialists in other areas, then it is wise to use both the abbreviation *and* the spelled out version the first time you use a special term in the document.

Offer Help

Spell terms out at least once

In a document or widely distributed memo, expand all acronyms upon their first use. Spell out the term, then immediately follow it with the acronym in parentheses. Exceptions might be very common acronyms that have become a part of the common institutional "culture." At the Jet Propulsion Laboratory, for example, some such terms could be JPL, NASA, and DSN. Other exceptions might be the jargon common to the industry (such as ASCII, DOS, CPU), depending on the audience.

In addition, consider defining the acronym again at the beginning of a new section (realizing that your readers may not be reading the document cover to cover) or if two or three pages separate uses of the term. Ideally, if your reader wants to double-check the meaning of an acronym, he or she should be able to find it spelled out not farther than one or two pages back---unless the term denotes the focus of the whole document.

Conversely, please do not give an acronym for a term you are not going to use again. When readers see an acronym in parentheses following a term, they naturally assume the acronym is going to pop up again; thus, they arc distracted from the subject matter while making a mental note of the acronym for later.

Make a Glossary

Every formal document that uses acronyms at all should include an alphabetical list of these, with their translations, either as part of the front matter or as an appendix. Moreover, in addition to spelling out the acronym, actually defining the term is often very helpful. For example, just knowing that RCD stands for "radar composite data" is not nearly as useful as knowing, in addition, that radar composite data is a Magellan spacecraft-specific data format containing engineering, radar, and altimeter data.

Spell out term on figures,

Figures should be the pages of a document that communicate the most and the quickest. We include them to clarify and elaborate on points in the text. in many documents, the figure captions are the only text read, or, at least the text that is read first. Thus, the definitions spelled out in the text may fail to do double duty for the figure captions too. As much as possible, spell out the terms in the captions. Make the captions informative and helpful in orienting the reader to the figure.

As for the callouts (labels on the different parts of the figure), some figures (such as block diagrams) look like mazes built of children's alphabet blocks. Sometimes the full callout terms are too long to fit on the figure. Nonetheless, it's a good idea to try to spell them out in the callouts, or, second best, include a legend box on the figure itself defining any necessary acronyms (see Figure 1).

FIGURE 1

Figure 1. Example of a figure that spells out as many of the callouts as possible and includes a key to translate acronyms.

Spell out terms in titles and headings,

As with figure captions and callouts, titles and headings should be spelled out. People glance at headings quickly to see the organization of the document and to find sections of interest. They may have missed the definition of a heading acronym that was given on the previous page. Also, headings are usually gathered, as is, into a table of contents; these headings should clearly describe the contents of each section.

Spell out terms in abstracts.

Abstracts are often required to stand alone in a computerized bibliogi aphy somewhere as the only clue to your paper or document. In any case, an abstract is read first and often is the *only* part read. Avoid using abbreviations or acronyms in an abstract. I'he reader will probably not have access to your glossary or first use of the term in the text, so cannot be expected to know its definition. Even introducing acronyms in parentheses after spelling them out in the abstract is a distraction and a waste of the few-word-limit generally imposed on abstracts.

As You Say It

It is good to remember that language was spoken long before it was written. The spoken language usually evolves (for better or worse) ahead of the written language. However, as pointed out in Part 1 of this article, the written language is more and more driving the spoken language, and in the case of acronyms, often to the detriment of speech, Although in writing technical and business material we try to be more precise and formal than we often are when we speak, writing is still symbolic of the spoken language, and we "hear" the language in our minds when we read. Therefore, some of the **"rules"** for abbreviating are based on sounds.

Spell out single words and common expressions.

Use of acronyms such as the following in narrative text distracts from readability (not to mention clarity):

FW	Firmware
I/F	Interface
H/w	Hardware
M/M	Multimission
PB	Playback
R/T	Real time
S/C	Spacecraft
S/W	Software
U/l.	Uplink

A good policy is to spell *it the way you pronounce it.* We say "hardware," not "l 1- W;" "spacecraft," not "S-C;"

Don 't use acronyms that are longer than words.

From the standpoint of sound, some acronyms are longer than the terms they abbreviate. For example, why use WBS for wide-band switch, when WBS has five syllables and wide-band switch has only three? As with two letter abbreviations such as S/C and l/F, if we don't *say* the abbreviation, we shouldn't write it that way. Other examples of abbreviations with as many or more syllables than what they abbreviate are:

WR	Waiver Request
SCT	Spacecraft Team
EOF	End of file

BW	Bandwidth
H R	High rate
WS	Workstation

Consider only sound when picking '<a" or "an. "

We use the article "a" before words beginning with a consonant sound and "an" before words beginning with a **vowel sound, acronyms included.** We would say, for example, "an SFDU" (standard formatted data unit) even though "S" is a consonant, because "S" begins with a vowel *sound* "ess." You may be in trouble, however, if you are not sure whether the acronym is pronounced as a word (that is, a "true" acronym) or an initialism and the first letter is F, H, L, M, N, R, S, or X. For example, if NASA were pronounced as individual letters instead of a two-syllable word, you'd say "*an* N. A.S.A. astronaut."

Watch for Ambiguity

Avoid familiar sounds that carry their own semantic baggage.

Quite a few acronyms and abbreviations have become a part of our common language, describing aspects of our common culture. These are used so often in writing, in the news media, and on the street that almost everyone understands their meaning, even if they may not know how the initials translate. Some examples are

AKA	Also known as
ATM	Automated Teller Machine
COD	Cash on delivery
CPA	Certified Public Accountant
DOA	Dead on arrival
DNA	Deoxyribonucleic acid
IRS	Internal Revenue Service
VIP	Very important person
VP	Vice-president
UPS	United Parcel Service

Some of these, however, may be rather arbitrarily adopted for more specific meanings within the context of a particular company or industry. For example, at the Jet Propulsion Lab, another meaning for UPS is "uninterruptable power supply"; CPA can also be "Command Processor Assembly."

Furthermore, some abbreviations sound like familiar words, whose meaning may distract. A few examples are PAP (Product Assurance Plan), RAT (Resource Analysis Team), S1S (software [or system or subsystem] interface specification). More on such matters of style in Part III in the next issue.

Be consistent,

In some large documents, the same abbreviation may stand for more than one term or phrase. This is not a good thing. Even if the context provides differentiation, this practice is likely to cause confusion for some readers.

And beware of acronyms commonly used in a single environment (that is, company or discipline or industry) to mean different things in different contexts. For example, here at the Lab, WBS can mean wide-band switch or work breakdown structure; DED can mean delayed engineering data or data element dictionary; EOM can mean end of mission, end of media, or end of message; MO can stand for Mars Observer or mission operations; DSN can stand

for Deep Space Network or data set name. Although the context may contain many clues that preclude confusion most of the time, the fact that readers may have other associations with the abbreviation distracts them from the meaning *you* arc trying to convey.

In attempting to find a definition for EDR, 1 heard one person tell me it means "engineering data record," another swear it means "experiment data record," and a third say it stands for "expedited data record." One problem here is that this entity (whatever it is) had been called an "EDR" for so long that its original meaning has become lost, even to those who use the term daily.

Shun Redundancy.

If you define "MCT" as "Mission Control Team," and later call it the "MCT Team," by your own definition you are saying "Mission Control Team Team. " If "DOS" stands for "Disk operating, System," don't say "DOS system." Don't write "SFDU data," if "SFDU" means "Standard Formatted Data Unit." Also, look for synonyms. If ''FOP" stands for "Facility and Operations Plan," you don't need to say "FOP document." A plan is understood to be a document.

Leave Apostrophes out of plural forms

As with most nouns, add a lower-case "s" or "es" to an acronym to make it plural. An apostrophe is needed only if you are making a possessive, which, by the way, is stylistically weak if the acronym stands for an inanimate object (as opposed to a person or group of people). For example,

Plural:

SFDUs are the "outer envelopes" on all SFOC-generated data sets.

Possessive:

The SFDU's length is given in bytes.

or, for better style,

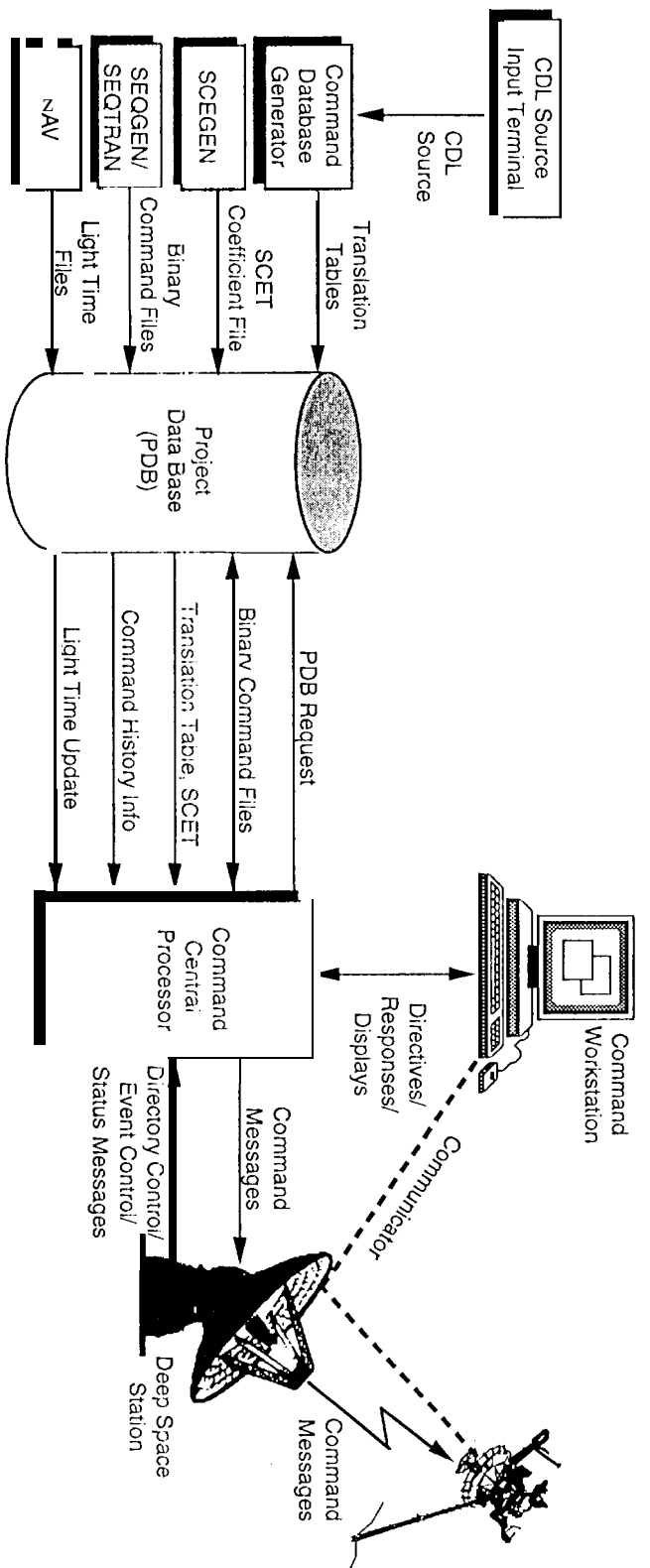The length of the SFDU is given in bytes

This one is okay:

This document needs the COE's signature.

(where COE stands for cognizant operations engineer).

in "Part 111: Matters of Style" in the next issue, I'll discuss how to reconcile the use of acronyms with the desire for good writing style.

Diane F. Miller
Documentation Group Leader, Mission Operations Section
Jet Propulsion Laboratory
California Institute of Technology
4800 Oak Grove Drive
Pasadena, California 91109, USA
(81 8) 354-9105

An STC member for 13 years, Ms. Miller has a B.A. in English and writes software user manuals for JPL's Multimission Ground Data System.

Part II 191

CDL Source
Input Terminal

CDL
Source

Command
Database
Generator

SCEGEN

SEQGEN/
SEQTRAN

NAV

Translation
Tables

SCET
Coefficient File

Binary
Command Files

Light Time
Files

Project
Data Base
(PDB)

PDB Request

Binary Command Files

Translation Table, SCET

Command History Info

Light Time Update

Command
Central
Processor

Directives/
Responses/
Displays

Command
Workstation

Communicator

Command
Messages

Directory Control/
Event Control/
Status Messages

Deep Space
Station

Command
Messages

Key:
CDL = Command Definition Language
NAV = Navigation Subsystem
SCEGEN = Spacecraft Event Time
  Generation Program
SCET = Spacecraft Event Time
SEQGEN = Sequence Generator
SEQTRAN = Sequence Translator

COMMUNICATING IN SPITE OF TLAS
(THRICE-LETTER ACRONYMS)

Part 111: To Verb or Not to Verb

Diane F. Miller
Jet Propulsion laboratory
California Institute of Technology
Pasadena, CA 91109

In Part 1 of this article (January '96), we speculated about why acronyms are flooding, into both the spoken and written language, both in specialized technical communication and in the popular culture. We also looked at some of the reasons their abundant use severely hampers communication. Last issue, in Part II, I suggested some ways to mitigate their destructive effect on communication. in Part III, I'll offer up a few stylistic considerations for those who are still interested in writing engaging prose, in spite of it all.

What is Style?

Style in writing goes beyond personality or a flair for words. It is, above all, clarity. Good style is made of whatever contributes to clarity, including conciseness, precision, and perhaps color and variety. (But clarity should never suffer at the hands of conciseness, color, and variety.) Introducing an acronym and then using the same three or four capital letters over and over in every other sentence does nothing to advance the cause of style, nor, in some cases, even conciseness. There may be a better way. Compare these sample paragraphs:

> With acronym only:
>
>> Test Workstation: The Test Workstation (TWS) subsystem hosts newly developed and purchased vendor software in the form of utilities that support SFOC system- and subsystem-level testing. TWS distributes test data throughout the SFOC system and captures and retrieves data from any of the SFOC subsystems. TWS can be used to do bit-level editing and manipulation of data.
>
> With variations on the acronym:
>
>> Test Workstation. The Test Workstation subsystem hosts newly developed and purchased vendor software in the form of utilities that support SFOC system- and subsystem-level testing. This workstation distributes test data throughout the system and captures and retrieves data from any of the data processing subsystems. It can also be used to do bit-level editing and manipulation of data.

The second paragraph has only one more word than the first, and uses considerably fewer acronyms. Sometimes even the word "it," used judiciously, carries more meaning within the structure of a paragraph than does a new acronym, no matter how much more specific the acronym might be in a literal sense.

Spelling out the complete term (provided it is of reasonable length), even several times on a page (but not several times in a paragraph), often adds clarity, interest, and elegance of style, even without any variation. This practice seldom takes anything away from clarity. If you get tired of typing the term over and over, use the acronym to write the draft, then use your word processor's global search and replace function to substitute the complete term.

Please Don't Verb the Acronyms!

Acronyms (even though they stand for strings of modifiers and nouns) are most often treated as simple nouns, or occasionally adjectives, in sentences. However, once in a while an acronym sprouts feet and starts running. Here are some true life examples:

JPL GFEs the information system.

Translation: JPL supplies the information system as government furnished equipment.

When a new map is created, the SCT FTPs the file onto the SFOC system where it is safed into the CDB by the DSOT.

Translation--[we think]: When a new [decommutation] map is created, the Spacecraft Team transfers [using the File Transfer Protocol] the tile to the Space Flight Operations Center system; the Data System Operations Team then stores it safely in the Central Data Base.

Any problems should be DARed to the FASO.

Translation: Any problems should be reported on a Development Anomaly Report form and sent to the Failure Accountability System Office.

Verbs are the vigor and muscle of language. What we do to them in the normal course of speech and writing is bad enough .-making passive verbal constructions (it has been determined that . . .), using nouns and adjectives as verbs (to prioritize, to multimissionalize, to optimize), burying perfectly good verbs under sterile fertilizer ("is cognizant of" instead of"knows,""hold discussions concerning" instead of ''discuss,'' "is illustrative of' instead of ''shows''). But to use acronyms as verbs, especially in writing, truly confounds things.

Verbs are often our only clear signposts in complicated, highly technical material. Make the most of their communication value by using real verbs that people under-stand.

Control Nesting instincts

A nested acronym is an acronym within an acronym (sometimes within yet another acronym, ad infinitum). For example, a FSM is a FPSO (Flight Projects Support Office) Systems Manager; GIF is the GCF (Ground Communication Facilities) interface subsystem. C/C was the "official" acronym for the CRAF/Cassini Project, where CRAF is already the acronym for Comet Rendezvous/Asteroid Flyby. (CRAF is no longer part of the Cassini mission, by the way.)

Although not exactly an acronym, one of the directives (commands) used on the Telemetry Input Subsystem of the ground data system here at J} 'I, is an example of how far afield we can go. The directive is **she,** which ultimately translates to "synthetic aperture radiotelegraphy detecting and ranging altitude burst header extraction," as diagrammed in Figure 1.

INSERT FIGURE 1.

Figure 1.   Example of a nested acronym carried to six levels of nesting. (Don 't try this at home.)

Wi(h nested acronyms, the imperviousness of ordinary acronyms is doubled (or maybe squared or cubed). When in a position to influence the creative process, remember the "keep it simple" principle.

Avoid &,@, and

l'he use of such symbols as the ampersand (&), at sign (@), and the number or pound sign (#) in the narrative of technical documents is too casual. These marks seem to be the author's way of saying"1 am too busy (or lazy) to spell even these small words for you." Shorthand symbols such as these are better used in handwritten notes you quickly scrawl at a meeting, when no one but you will need to read them later.

And Simply Matters of Aesthetics . . .

Elegance, no doubt, is in the eye of the beholder. A job title such as Configuration Management Manager, even abbreviated CM Manager, is not elegant--or even logical. Alternatives? An obvious one is to toss in a little grammatical structure and at least make it "Manager of the Configuration Management Office." Another possibility might be just "Configuration Manager."

Or, how about a seminar called "1. .D.E.A.S.," for "Integrity of Data and Environment for Archiving Seminar." What is being archived, the seminar? It makes a catchy (albeit irrelevant) acronym, but does it make sense grammatically?

Or, how about a small task called the SFOC Pilot Hands-on User Demonstration for Galileo Experiments (SFOC PHUDGE)? That one almost gets stuck in the back of the throat. E}'eking a similar response is DSN (Deep Space Network) operations ~'cam, DSNOT.

The wisdom of avoiding the ugly seems obvious (once we agree what is ugly). However, avoiding the "cute" may also be desirable. Sometimes projects or systems are intentionally named so that the abbreviation will be catchy or cute. Such attempts have given us SFOC (Space Flight Operations Center) Operations Pilot 1 lands-On Investigation Environment (dubbed SOPHIE), and Mars Observer Pilot SOPC (Science Operations Planning Computer) Implementation Effort (MOPSIE), both SOPHIE and MOPSIE cleverly combining catchiness with nesting. A "SAN'l'A" project (Science Analysis Near-Term Activity) was introduced around the holidays. Or, how about Orbital Operations Planning, dubbed 00PS, making the orbit (or the planning) sound suspiciously wobbly. Some folks developing a resource center for secretaries came up with the name Support Personnel Resource Management, or SPRM, Bank. Fortunately, they reconsidered.
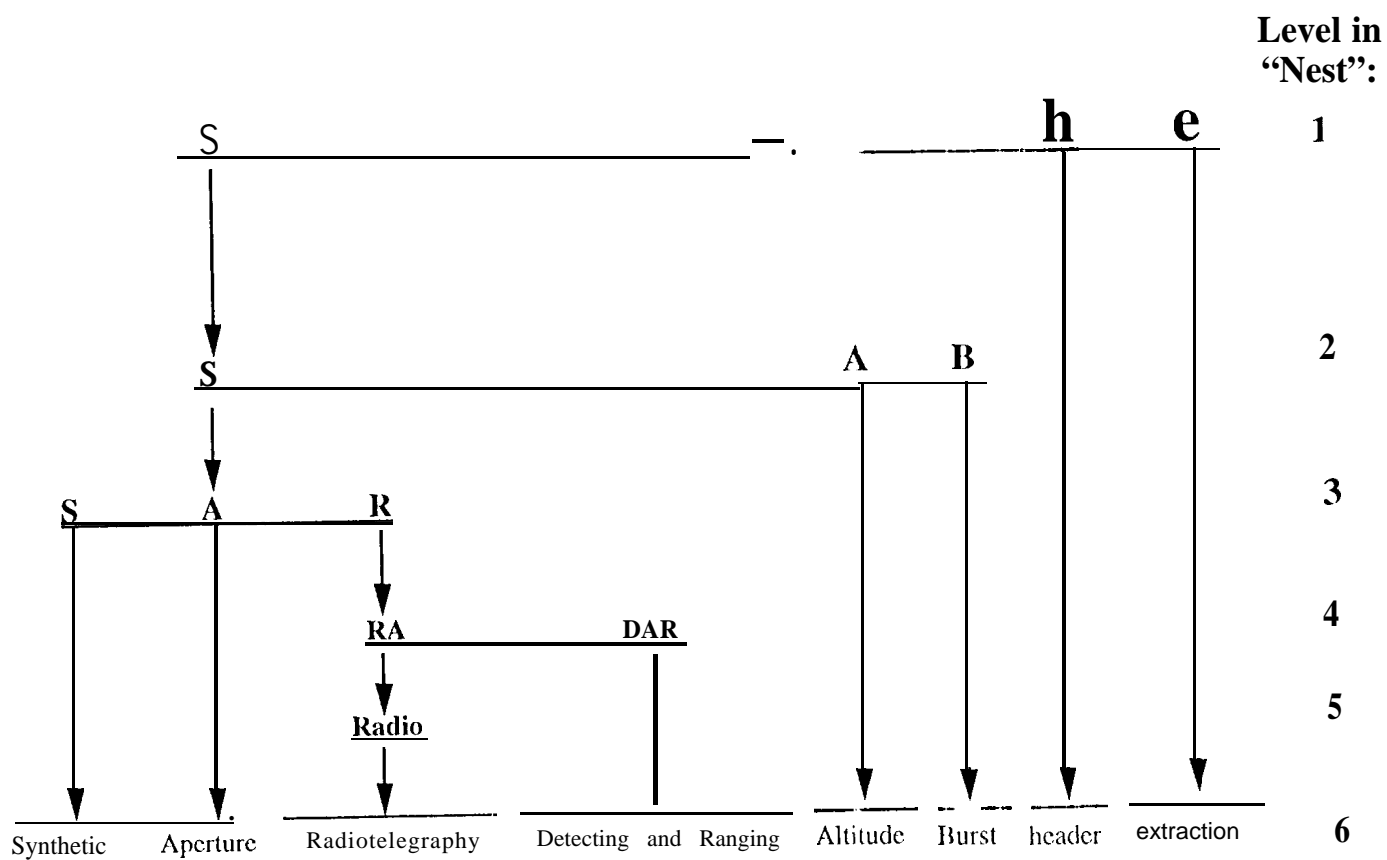
The "cutesie effect" is something to consider in deciding whether your ultimate goal will be advanced by the nomenclature you select.

Conclusion

Acronyms and abbreviations are a common topic of coffee-pot and lunchtime conversation here at the Lab and at your company, too, no doubt. It is apparent from the laughter and the tears that, deep down, everyone suffers from them . . . yet everyone uses them, and most people get to create one at some time or another. What we need are a few risk-takers, brave souls who will dare to be clearly understood trendsetters who recognize that brevity is not necessarily the soul of wit in every case- that taking an extra breath every now and then to connect with their reader or listener is the valorous thing to do.

Diane F. Miller
Documentation Group Leader, Mission Operations Section
Jet Propulsion Laboratory
California Institute of Technology
4800 Oak Grove Drive
Pasadena, California 91109, USA
(81 8) 354-9105

An STC member for 13 years, Ms. Miller has a B.A. in English and writes software user manuals for JPL's Multimission Ground Data System.

								Level in "Nest":
S			_.		h	e		1
S			A	B				2
S	A	R						3
	RA	DAR						4
	Radio							5
Synthetic	Aperture	Radiotelegraphy	Detecting and Ranging	Altitude	Burst	header	extraction	6

Part III., Fig.